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CURIOSITIES OF MUSICAL HISTORY.

No. III.

Contributed by E. HOLMES, Author of the "Life of Mozart."

A PASSAGE in our last paper reminds us that something remains to be said respecting the clarionet. There is, probably, no phrase, the true meaning of which more embarrasses people in the performance of their devotions at church than one which occurs in the monthly reading of the Psalms:—"With trumpets, also, and shawms." The shawm was the rude original of the clarionet—an instrument, which, notwithstanding its late adoption in our orchestras, and the exquisite service it performs there, was principally valued in high antiquity for its powers of noise.

Clarionets have no place in the opera or oratorio scores of Handel. They were first introduced into our Italian opera band by J. C. BACH, in his opera entitled *Orione ossia Diana vendicata*. Even there, though trial of them had been made in Germany and Italy, their progress seems to have been slow; and they were long—from their defective construction, probably—considered as of uncertain and dangerous intonation. The three varieties used in our present orchestra:—in B flat, in A, and in C,—through the advance of modern artists and artificers, are seldom liable to any charge of this kind; and, whether in the solo or in accompaniment, the clarionet is now one of the most important members of the family of wind instruments. To Mozart belongs the honor of having first thoroughly indicated and developed the peculiar genius of this instrument, as well as its place in the harmonious system of the orchestra. The overture and opera of *Idomeneo*, as well as the symphony which he produced about 1778, in Paris, exhibit the earliest examples of the complete disposition of a modern score.

As the musical accents of the clarionet have been but so lately adapted to orchestral purposes, we may the better conceive its harsh and noisy character in ancient times. It was in the hands of military musicians for open-air music, and in those of the musical retainers of the feudal nobility to play a signal to dinner. An old scrap of verse is instructive on this head—

Lords in the Hall were sette—
Waits blew to the meate.

When Richard I. was playing off his Greek fire against Acre, at his memorable siege of that place, the "trumpets, horn, and schalmys" (shawms) made such a noise in his galley, that their sound might be heard "to the sky." From many inci-

dental scenes and allusions in Shakspeare, we may gather that the attempts at making music with wind instruments in his time were extremely awkward and barbarous, and that a joke at the expense of the performers was well received and generally appreciated by audiences. There is a little scene, much to our present purpose, in *Othello*. The musicians brought in by Cassio to play "something that's brief" have their serenade quickly interrupted by the clown—

Clo. Are these, I pray you, call'd wind instruments?

1st Mus. Ay, marry are they, sir.

Clo. * * * masters, here's money for you; and the general so likes your musick that he desires you of all loves to make no more noise with it.

1st Mus. Well, sir, we will not.

Clo. If you have any musick that may not be heard, to't again: but, as they say, to hear musick, the general does not greatly care.

In the extremely simple and harmless replies and talk of the musicians introduced in *Othello*, and in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakspeare seems to have had in view a set of poor-spirited men, conscious that they lived by sufferance, and extremely cautious of giving offence. The waits who had before this time been dislodged from their habitation and warm appointments in castles, to take the road and depend upon the casual bounty of mankind at large, may have afforded a hint for the picture. Poor people do not willingly let fall any custom of traditional benevolence; and to this the waits still reserve an annual right—issuing from their appointed tap-rooms in the depths of the Christmas night, to break our rest with the "drowsy charm" of polkas and other popular tunes which they murder with vile harmony. It must be the annual largess which makes the name still survive at a period when the traditions of its original meaning are almost lost.

But the itinerant minstrel is not the only professor of public entertainment who has felt the force of changed times and circumstances. So fickle is public taste, and so numerous are the competitors for precedence, that there is no stability in the practice of any art which depends upon popular favour. Ben Jonson gives a ludicrous picture of a strolling player in his time (1601). He is addressed in the words following: "Thou shalt not need to travel, with thy pumps full of gravel, any more after a blind jade and a hamper, and stalk upon boards and barrel-heads to the sound of an old crackt trumpet." Yet, before the actor could even prosecute this wretched and precarious mode of existence, he was obliged to fee the master of the revels to King Charles I. for his licence. There was an attempt about this time, also, to give the right of licensing persons desirous of practising the profession of music, but it never took effect; and Burney justly remarks that it was a power which could not with safety have been entrusted to any set of men.

Novelty seems to have been in incessant de-

mand at the first rise of the arts of amusement. Even the minstrels constantly retained in the houses of the nobility, found it advisable sometimes to seek new audiences among the neighbouring monasteries of the county. The Prior's accounts of the Augustine Canons of Maxtoke, in Warwickshire, show what liberal patronage was bestowed on this class of professional visitors, and with what avidity they were received by the monks. Payments are made to *Mimi, Jocolatores, Jocatores, Lusoers*, &c., a variety of performers, yet all of whom are said at different times to have practised the same arts of popular entertainment. That same Prior of Maxtoke has been before mentioned as a festive churchman, who chose occasionally to entertain his musician visitors at supper in his private apartment.

It is to be remarked that the performers so much applauded in monasteries were under sentence of excommunication.* The lower order of the brethren shewed their appetite for these exhibitions in some characteristic traits of behaviour, if we may credit the following anecdote told by Wood:—"Two itinerant priests coming towards night to a cell of Benedictines, near Oxford, gained admittance on the supposition of their being mimes or minstrels. But the cellarer, sacrist, and others of the brethren, who hoped to have been entertained with their ludicrous pantomimic arts, finding them to be nothing more than two indigent ecclesiastics who could only administer spiritual consolation, being consequently disappointed of their mirth, beat them and turned them out of the monastery." Representations in dumb show or masquerade appear to have been a common source of amusement. Whether actors of this kind, in default of language, were somewhat extravagant and indecorous in gesture, can hardly be said; but they seem to bear a peculiar stigma, which almost excites a curiosity to know to what extremes their pantomimic pieces were carried and tolerated. However, deprecation of the lives and morals of the performers, and encouragement of their entertainments, certainly proceeded in an equal degree.

William of Wykeham, in the statutes of New College, Oxford, 1380, orders his scholars, for their recreation on Festival days, in the hall, "after dinner and supper, to entertain themselves with songs and other diversions consistent with decency; and to recite poems, chronicles of kingdoms, the wonders of the world, together with the like compositions not misbecoming the clerical character." This kind of relaxation found encouragement from the gravest men.

* What dread was attached to this penalty in olden times it would be interesting to know. A hawk is carried from its perch in the cloisters of the Abbey, at Bermondsey, in service-time, and the thief is excommunicated. The Bishop of Winchester, in the reign of Stephen, threatens to excommunicate all the soldiers in a neighbouring fortified castle if in foraging for stores they molest people coming to make purchases at his fair.

Dean Colet, the learned and pious founder of St. Paul's school, was particular in enjoining the attendance of every scholar at the annual sermon of the child-bishop. Erasmus tells us that Sir Thomas More, while yet a page in the household of Archbishop Moreton, not only wrote little comedies but performed in them. It is said that he commonly gave more pleasure than all the rest of the actors put together.

From being zealous amateurs of dramatic representations, the friars at length ventured upon performances of their own. A regulation of Wolsey exists which restrains them in the exercise of this amusement within the precincts of their monastery. The children of the choir, however, who, besides their vocal duties, were specially educated in the mimic art, were under no such restrictions. Their pieces were often given at the castles of the neighbouring nobility. In their occasional performances in the choir, assisted by the music of the organ and with singing, we may trace the origin of opera. In *Hamlet* there is a somewhat contemptuous reference to the taste for choir-boy actors. The society of parish clerks afterwards invaded their province both in singing and in acting. The expensive masques performed by the members of the law societies of Gray's-inn, &c., with the most elaborate scenery and the best music of the day, completed all the preparations for the introduction of opera to the notice and patronage of the public at large. During the commonwealth, amusements of all kinds had a good deal languished; but when Dryden and Purcell combined their powers to establish opera on the firm basis of sense and sound, they were so over-assisted in expensive dresses and decorations, that the undertaking was almost ruined in the outset. Here is the whole history of the decay of English opera to the present time—pageantry makes music too dear.

The mere payment of the orchestra in the masque presented by the gentlemen of the inns of court to Charles I. was more than £1,000. The procession so delighted their majesties, who were looking on from a window, that they sent to desire the performers to veer about and repeat it. Afterwards they saw the whole masque over again at an entertainment given for the purpose by the Lord Mayor. Locke and Mr. Simon Ives, composers, got about £100 each for their services. And Mr. Bulstrode Whitelock, an amateur, whose musical fame rests on his having composed a coranto which Queen Henrietta approved and thought even too sprightly to be English, relates that he entertained some of the principal musicians at a tavern in Fleet-street, each of whom was not a little surprised and pleased on taking up his plate to find £40 under it.

The privileges connected with the profession of

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the fine arts in their origin are amusing. Whoever killed a bard, in Ireland, in ancient times, had to pay a fine of a hundred cows. The bard himself might fire a castle and commit murder by wholesale; yet, if he repeated a fine extemporaneous ode, he was commonly pardoned. No one had freer access to royalty than the musician. Edward I., saved from assassination in the Holy Land by his harper, is a familiar fact to school-boys. King Edward IV., lying encamped in the north, was roused from sleep by his serjeant minstrel, who warned him that the enemy were approaching. Mandeville, the traveller, states that when the Emperor of Cathay is seated at dinner "nobody may venture to speak to him "except it be his musicians." An instance of the freedom of speech which was permitted to minstrels at the most solemn celebrities is given by Mathew of Paris. "About the year 1250, Henry III., passing some time in France, held a magnificent feast in the great hall of Knights Templars at Paris; at which, besides his own suite, were present the kings of France and Navarre, and all the nobility of France. The walls of the hall were hung all over with shields, among which was that of our King Richard I. Just before the feast began, a minstrel accosted King Henry, thus: "My Lord, why did you "invite so many Frenchmen to feast with you in "this hall? Behold, there is the shield of Richard "the magnanimous king of England! All the "Frenchmen present will eat their dinner in fear "and trembling!" This speech was well adapted to create the "sensation" which to the present hour appears so welcome in French assemblies.

The dramatic effect of some striking interruption in a great solemnity seems to have been appreciated long before its application to the musical drama was dreamed of. When the Tartar king, Cambuscan, is celebrating his birthday in the midst of his nobles, and listening to his minstrels who are playing deliciously, the assembly is suddenly hushed by the entrance of a stranger knight, on a horse of brass, who rides up directly to the high board:

In all the hall ne was there spoke a word,
For marveile of this knight him to behold.

The effect of the silence and suspense here imagined exceeds the powers even of the modern theatre to realize. In some of the romances anterior to Chaucer, there are situations admirably adapted to the lyrical drama; and it is to be regretted that the marriage of the Soldan of Damascus was never formed into a *libretto* for the vehement and impassioned Handel. The original verse pleased when recited in the halls of our ancestors, and the situations are so true as to be good at any time.

The Christian king of Tarsus has a very lovely daughter. The fame of this heroine spreads far

and wide, and there is a great desire of "princes pert in play" to be allowed to see her. But the Soldan of Damascus has more serious intentions; he really thinks that his heart will "break into five" if he cannot marry her; and he, consequently, sends a polite message to her father with the most honorable proposals. The soldan is just sitting down to his first course at dinner, when his messengers return, and, falling down on their knees before him, relate the insulting refusal of the king of Tarsus "without any lies."

Heathen hounde he doth thee calle,
And ere his dogtur he give thee tille
Thyn herte blode he woll spille
And thi barrons alle.

Was ever the dinner of potentate so interrupted! The rage of the soldan knew no bounds. He started up, tore his robe and hair, kicked down the dinner table, and swore by Mahoun that he would win her with his sword.

He lokede as a wyldc Iyoune,

and in the mean time proceeded to make a general attack, *pell-mell*, on the company.

Alle that he hitte, he smote down right,
Both serjeant and knight—
Earl and eke baroun.

A great battle is afterwards fought between the soldan and the king, in which the latter is worsted, and returns home quite disconsolate. His daughter appears before him in a rich pall, and, kneeling, begs that she may be allowed to put an end to the strife by marrying the soldan. Not receiving a very encouraging answer, she elopes. In the end, the soldan is baptised; he becomes a very dutiful and amicable son-in-law; and he and the king of Tarsus, joining their forces together, commit great ravages on the infidel Saracens.

Tales of chivalry and romantic adventure are allowed to have been more acceptable, even in the halls of churchmen, than recitations founded on pious legends, or matters which glanced particularly on their profession. As age gives the flavour of old romance to the modern reader, so at the time of its production, remoteness in the scene of action appears to have been necessary to stimulate the imagination. We import from the Saracens numerous musical instruments, as well as materials for poetry and fiction. The East was, in days of yore, the established land of necromancy and conjuration; and the Saracens, in the time of the crusades, are painted not as men but as devils. They advanced to the combat in horrible visors and horned, crying *Hhu! Hhu!* while the Christian knights sung *Kyrie Eleison!* The "men of Inde" were long thought to deal with the evil one; and Albertus Magnus, who made a brazen head which would talk, and which Aquinas, his pupil, knocked in pieces for its *too much chattering*, are both said to

have studied their craft among the Arabians. Magicians had need to come from a distance. Chaucer's Frankeleyn (country gentleman) is a steadfast believer in the arts of conjuration.

For oft at festes, I have herde saie
That magetors, within a halle large
Have made to comyn water in a barge,
And in the halle rowyn up and down.

The origin of secular music is so involved with the popular superstitions, manners, and customs of antiquity, that our quotations illustrative of this subject scarcely need an apology; and we break off for the present with the view of an orchestra playing before the king of France, at a public dinner, before the year 1300. The instruments are numerous and odd:—the kettle-drum, the flageolet, the cornet, the Latin harp, the Bohemian flute, the trumpet, the Moorish harp, and the fiddle. Can we wonder that foreign artists were early patronized?

To be continued.

ST. MARTIN'S HALL.

THE inauguration of the new Music Hall in Long Acre—an edifice which promises to be, when complete, one of the most spacious and effective choral concert rooms in the kingdom, has been the principal event of the late month, and of the opening musical season. On Monday, Feb. 11, the great Hall was opened to the public with a concert under the direction of Mr. John Hullah. About 1000 persons attended as auditors.

The length of the hall at present is between 70 and 80 feet, the width 55, and the height 40. But the design is not yet accomplished; 50 feet are to be added to the length of the room, which, when finished, will fulfil the conditions declared by those learned in acoustics to be most favourable to musical effect—viz., "the length something more than double the width, and the height the third of the length." The ceiling, flat in the middle, sloping at the sides, and laid out in framed compartments, will look very handsome when filled up and painted; while the walls, supplied with the galleries that are to stretch along the entire length of the north, south, and west sides, will be agreeably relieved of their naked aspect. The orchestra is constructed on the principle of gradual elevation, but approaches much less nearly to the perpendicular than that of Exeter-hall. As there is no organ at present, some artifice of division is advisable, for the better effect of double choruses; but in other respects the absence of that colossal obstruction has its advantages. The chorus, between 400 and 500 in number, summoned from the ranks of Mr. Hullah's upper singing-school, and the band, consisting of upwards of 70 performers, filled the orchestra to the extremities. The hall being also completely crammed, and the whole brilliantly lighted by a double row of elegantly formed chandeliers, suspended from the roof, the aspect presented to the eye was brilliant and animated. When Mr. Hullah took his place in the conductor's rostrum he was hailed by a burst of enthusiastic applause from every part of the building, a token of the high estimation in which he is held as well by the general public as by his own pupils.

It is impossible in the present unfinished condition of the building to decide upon its ultimate capability of musical effect; but what has been heard warrants very favourable prepossessions.

The most important novelty of the evening was the production of a Festival Anthem, "Let God arise," for a double choir, by a young English Composer, Mr. Henry Leslie. The *Times* gives the following criticism on this production:—

Mr. Leslie's Anthem, the words of which are wholly selected from the 68th psalm, is a work of more than ordinary promise. It opens with a grand full chorus in A major, "Let God arise," in which the young musician has proved himself capable of conducting a series of harmonies in eight vocal parts with great clearness. The *fugato* on the words "Let him, also, that hate him," with its close answer and pointed accent, though recalling a theme in one of the choruses of the *Messiah*, is ingenious and effective. A short tenor solo introduces a chorus in D, "So let the ungodly perish," of no particular note, which, without finishing, leads to a *soprano* air in F, "But let the righteous be glad." This is flowing, vocal, and harmonized with much taste. A few bars of *adagio* for the full choir form the preface to a chorus in A minor, "The earth shook," which is highly dramatic and expressive, although the passage in the key of D flat, and the subsequent enharmonic modulation are not easy for the chorus to sing in tune. Another *adagio* in three-four time, a pendant to this chorus, is less to our liking; there is too much modulation, and too little tune. The tenor air in E major, "Thou, O God," which comes next, is very melodious; the character is strictly devotional, and the effect of the violoncello *obligato* beautiful. The next chorus, "The Lord gave the word," in G, is one of the best in the anthem. With Handel's version of the same words before him, Mr. Leslie has contrived to be quite original, and at the same time impressive. The second part of this chorus, "Kings with their armies," evince a strong dramatic feeling, but towards the end the modulation is too redundant. A charming *duettino* in A minor, for soprano and tenor, "Give thanks, O Israel," which, in addition to a plaintive melody, is to be noted for the extreme refinement of the accompaniments, brings us to the final chorus in A major, "Sing unto God," the most elaborate and skilfully written in the entire work. The fugue on the words, "O sing praises," answered in the second bar, and varied by two episodic subjects, is conceived and carried out with remarkable ability. The instrumentation of this anthem, allowing for the modern tendency to make too liberal use of trombones, trumpets, &c., is exceedingly clear and effective. The choruses are all double choruses, sometimes written in two alternate choirs, sometimes in eight pure parts—an achievement demanding no less facility than knowledge. Altogether, Mr. Leslie's composition does him infinite credit. The mere attempt augurs a highly laudable ambition; but a success such as Mr. Leslie has obtained implies the possession of gifts that are accorded to few. As far as the chorus was concerned, nothing could be more satisfactory than the execution of the anthem, but the unaccountable absence of the second clarinet spoiled some of the best of the instrumental combinations. The reception of this work by the audience was throughout most flattering.

The other opinions of the contemporary press are not less favourable. We extract the following observations from the *Morning Chronicle*:—

The main interest of the concert lay in Mr. Leslie's "Festival Hymn," now for the first time performed. It speaks well for Mr. Hullah's ultimate purposes, that he should thus have inaugurated his new undertaking by the production of the work of a young English composer: it